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EXPLANATION OF THE SEATTLE TOTEM POLE.

EVERY visitor to Seattle, Washington, has been attracted and more or less interested by the great totem pole that adorns its main square, but until recently no authentic explanation of the carvings upon it had been obtained.

During the last year, however, Professor Edmond S. Meany of the University of Washington interested himself in the matter, and after much correspondence obtained an account of it from a Tlingit Indian of Ketchikan, David E. Kininnook, which was published in the Seattle "Post-Intelligencer" of September 4, last.

Recently Professor Boas has received from Mr. George Hunt much longer versions of the myths here illustrated and has transmitted them to me, suggesting that I extract the essential portions and send them to the *Journal of American Folk-Lore* for publication, along with a reproduction of the pole. The accounts were obtained by Mr. George Hunt from its former owner, Mrs. Robert Hunt, and therefore ought to be reliable. It seems that the pole belonged to the Gānaxa'dī (People of Gā'nax), one of the principal Tlingit families belonging to the Raven clan.

At the top of this pole is Raven himself in the act of carrying off the moon in his mouth. The story told about this is the familiar northwest coast tale of the being at the head of Nass, who kept daylight and the moon in boxes in his house, and of how Raven stole these by assuming the form of a hemlock needle, letting himself be swallowed by that chief's daughter and being born again through her. But after recounting in the usual manner how the disguised Raven obtained the daylight and moon by crying for them, this version concludes in the Nass fashion, *i. e.* Raven lets out the light to obtain olachen from the ghosts who are fishing from canoes made of grave-boxes. In the Wrangel version these fishermen appear as the original animals who were then in human shape but fled to the woods and into the sea, and became the kinds of animals whose skins they happened to be wearing at the time. Mr. Hunt's version also makes the home of the keeper of daylight in a cave, and presents Raven's quest as the result of a council to which he had called all of his people.

The next two figures are said to be a woman and a frog illustrating the familiar story of the woman who teased a frog and was carried off to the frog town, where she married. To recover her, the lake in which the frog town stood was drained. According to Mr. Hunt the woman whose story is related here was one of the Gānaxa'dī called Gatlā'x, but it is generally told of the Kiksa'dī.



TOTEM POLE AT SEATTLE

Aside from this it differs from other tales of the sort only in making the heroine send her two little sons back to her father's house after a bone to pierce holes in skins, and in making her father's people break a dam in order to drain the lake and kill all of the frogs except her children after they had done so.

Below the frog carving comes another episode from the story of Raven. First is a carving of Mink, then Raven, next a common whale, and at the bottom "the chief of all birds." It is the familiar tale relating how Raven was swallowed by a whale and lived on its insides until he killed it and drifted ashore, but the version is very elaborate and differs in many particulars from any heretofore published. In the first place Raven is represented as taking Mink along with him as his companion. This is an incident of the tradition of the Kimkink.¹ Secondly, the whale is asked to take them across a bay or strait as a favor, and himself directs Raven to cut out and eat portions of his fat if he will be careful not to touch his heart. After the people outside had cut a hole in order to liberate them, it is said that Mink jumped out all oily and rolled in rotten wood, giving his fur the appearance it has to-day, and that Raven did likewise.

The conclusion is quite new to me. According to this the whale drifted ashore at Naikun or Rose Spit on the northeastern end of the Queen Charlotte Islands, and afterwards Raven and Mink started to walk around them. "One day he [Raven] found a great house, and then he thought to himself, 'I will go and see whose house it is?' And when he went into it there he saw a great man with a bird beak on him, and as soon as Yätl [the Raven] saw him he knew who it was. And then Yätl called him by his name. His name is Nasak Yale or Chief of all Birds. Now he [Raven] was the chief of the Raven tribe." Because this person was chief of all the birds, Yätl had a long talk with him and told him everything that he had done. The chief of all the birds was not pleased with those things, however, so he turned Raven into the bird we see to-day and Mink into a corresponding animal.

There is substantial agreement between these explanations and those given by Mr. Kininnook. In the second episode, however, the latter makes it a man who married a frog woman, and he weaves the whole story into the myth of Raven by making Raven tell this man to do so. He also seems to identify Mink with Low-Tide-Woman, whom he makes Raven marry in order to obtain things found at low tide. In the version of the Raven story which I collected at Wrangel, Mink also appears in the tale of Low-Tide-Woman but is not identified with her. Again, Mr. Kininnook calls this whale a killer instead of a common whale, and makes Raven marry it in order to get more

¹ Boas, *Indianische Sagen von der Nord-Pazifischen Küste Amerikas*.

food, while the lowest figure he identifies with the keeper of the daylight, whom he calls the father, instead of the grandfather of Raven.

This last being is worthy of special attention. The native name that Mr. Hunt gives him, Nasak Yale, and which I write Nās-ca'kī-yētl, means Raven-at-the-Head-of-Nass and was given by my Wrangel informant as the name of the keeper of the daylight, moon, etc. He was furthermore asserted to be the supreme deity of the Tlingit and the special object of their prayers. I had supposed this view of him to have arisen under missionary stimulus, but what Mr. Hunt says would suggest that there was some aboriginal foundation for it. Perhaps he was the Tlingit equivalent for the Tsimshian and Haida heaven gods, Laxha' and Sins sgā'nagwai.¹

John R. Swanton.

¹ Respecting the pole figured on the frontispiece Mr. Hunt writes: "This is the totem pole at Fort Rupert, imitation of that taken from Alaska and now in Seattle, put up by its true owner, Mrs. Robert Hunt, who put it over her dead mother as a tombstone." He adds that its true history will be found in the paper written by him, and signs himself "Geo. Hunt, History Collector."